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July 6, 2011

Mr. Dennis Radford, Administrator  
ESU 17  
207 N. Main Street  
Ainsworth, NE 69210

Dear Mr. Radford:

Representatives of the AdvancED®-Nebraska Office recently conducted a Readiness Visit to your Educational Service Unit to determine the capacity of your agency to pursue AdvancED ESA Accreditation and to orient district personnel to the ESA Accreditation Process. The Readiness Visit indicated that your agency clearly possesses the capacity to pursue ESA Accreditation. We have enclosed the Readiness Report for your review and use.

The next step will be to submit a "Letter of Commitment" indicating that your service unit wishes to pursue ESA Accreditation. You should also include documentation, such as a copy of the minutes, indicating that there is formal approval by your agency's governing board to become accredited. Please send the letter and the appropriate documentation to:

Warren Jacobson  
AdvancED  
7665 S. Research Drive  
Tempe, AZ 85287

We look forward to working with Educational Service Unit 17 as the accreditation processes are formalized. Please contact me at 402-471-0955 or [freida.lange@nebraska.gov](mailto:freida.lange@nebraska.gov) if questions arise. Congratulations on the good work you are doing!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Freida Lange".

Freida Lange, State Director  
AdvancED-Nebraska State

**Readiness Report**  
**For ESA Accreditation**  
**Educational Service Unit #17**

*Dennis Radford, Administrator*

*207 North Main Street*

*Ainsworth, NE 69210*

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May 23, 2011



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## READINESS REPORT for Advanced™ ACCREDITATION

**Purpose:** This report is designed to reflect a school's/district's/Educational Service Agency's (ESA's) readiness for accreditation by reviewing their Self-Assessment of Readiness and examining its practices in relation to the Advanced Standards for accreditation. By assessing a school's/district's/ESA's readiness, a determination can be made regarding its capacity to meet the Advanced Standards and whether it can be granted candidacy status for accreditation.

**Demographics:** Provide a brief summary of the ESA's demographics:

Educational Service Unit #17, is located in the Sandhills of north-central Nebraska in the town of Ainsworth with a satellite office in Valentine. The unit provides services to a four county area consisting of Brown, Cherry, Rock and Keya Paha counties. Within this 8962 square mile area, there are approximately 1613 students and 174 teachers. Five districts, Ainsworth Community Schools, Cody-Kilgore Unified Schools, Keya Paha County Schools, Rock County Schools, and Valentine Community Schools make up ESU 17's member schools. The unit provides services to the schools through the following departments: Instructional Materials, Computer Services, Federal Programming, Cooperative Purchasing, Special Education, and Health Services. All schools are K-12 grade level public schools. Preschool services are provided in some of the schools.

Service Unit 17 has been in existence for 42 years as a result of legislation enacted in 1965 that established 19 intermediate agencies across the state of Nebraska. In a rural state, it is both effective and efficient to provide staff development, technology, and special education services in a collaborative service setting to best meet the learning needs of area students. Approximately 31 professional and staff support members are employed by ESU #17. All services to students are provided at the school sites by ESU staff. The unit does not operate any programs for students at the ESU facilities.

Based on the 2009-2010 State of The Schools Report, student enrollment within the five member schools range from 97 to 702. Of the member schools, 39.18% to 56.41% of the students meet poverty guidelines; 0% to .20% are English Language Learners; 5.15% to 13.61% receive Special Education services; and 3.09% to 12.04% are mobile.

An advisory council, which consists of elected and appointed school superintendents, fulfills an important role in mapping out the future direction of ESU #17. The Council meets at least quarterly to communicate and share vital information related to the needs of area school systems. An elected Board of Directors representing every county within the boundaries of ESU 17 serves as the governing body of ESU 17.

## READINESS REPORT for Advanced™ ACCREDITATION

**Section 1:** Please summarize the ESA's completed Self-Assessment of Readiness.

Twenty-one staff members, including the leadership team, met on January 4, 2011 to review the results of the self-assessment that had been completed on-line. Staff completed an activity to arrive at consensus regarding the overall ratings. All staff members in a whole group setting reviewed the first section of the self-assessment, titled "Necessary Conditions." The staff then divided into small groups of three to four members to review the results and assign ratings for the remainder of the instrument. Each group reported to the large group, the ratings they had determined for their assigned section.

Overall, the whole staff rated 25% of the indicators as Emerging, 70% were Operational, and 5% were Highly Functional. After completing the self-assessment process, the service unit staff expressed that they bonded through this activity and collectively identified their wants and needs based upon this process. Staff realized that this tool and process provided them with a true picture of the unit and it also helped staff to better understand the purpose and direction of the leadership team. As a unit, they discovered that they must build a system that provides sustainability to the continuous improvement process and not just provide staff development.

Areas on the self assessment that were marked especially high were usually dependent upon job assignment and to which school district the individual staff member was assigned. Overall, the ESU staff identified that the service unit does a great job in supporting students and teachers by being involved in the individual learning of students at the individual buildings.

An area identified as needing work or an "eye opener" was in the area of continuous improvement. The "new process pushes us out of our comfort zone – which is a good thing".

## READINESS REPORT for Advanced™ ACCREDITATION

**Section 2:** Please summarize the ESA's capacity to meet the Advanced Standards for accreditation.

- **Vision and Purpose** – ESU 17's Self-Assessment of Readiness results were compiled by the leadership team in January of 2011. Vision and mission were identified as an emerging area. The leadership team participated in an activity to review their current vision and mission statements. Conversation and coming to consensus about common definition of vision and mission was held. As a result of this activity, the leadership team recommended that the vision statement remain the same but the mission statement was rewritten to give them better direction as a school. This recommendation was shared with all staff and board members for their input. The leadership team believes that due to their participation in this activity, as a unit, they have a better understanding of their vision and mission and believes that they will better represent who they are and where they are going.
- **Governance and Leadership** – ESU 17 is governed by an eight-person elected board and one administrator. A director heads each department at ESU 17. Two board members were present during the question and answer session held toward the end of the readiness visit. It was reported that the full board is kept informed of school improvement activities via report outs at board meetings.

A leadership team leads the continuous improvement process. This team's membership consists of representation from media, special education, technology, staff development and administration. The team meets four times per school year. All staff is kept informed of CIP activities via the CIP wiki and e-mails.

ESU 17's administrator meets with the advisory council at least four times per school year to inform them of activities. The ESU administrator uses the advisory council to establish yearly goals and objectives.

- **Teaching and Learning** – The service unit does not operate any programs "in-house". All support services are provided on site at the member schools. The primary services provided are in special education. Other services include: operating of a media/instructional material library, technology support including distance learning, and staff development. In support of the distance-learning program, the service unit worked with the schools to adopt a uniform calendar across the four counties. This makes the sending and receiving of DL courses easier and therefore more accessible to all students.
- **Documenting and Using Results** – ESU 17's services are totally integrated into the member school districts. The unit is totally dependent on their member schools to provide them with student data. ESU 17 is working with its schools to gain access to their state data. One of the five schools served has granted access by giving the unit a password. ESU 17 does have access to DIBELS, MAPS, and ILCD data.
- **Resources and Support Systems** – ESU 17 rated themselves as Operational, overall, in the area of providing resources, both human and material, to their member schools. The readiness team believes, based upon the visit, that ESU 17 functions well in this area. Staff surveys their schools and develops goals to meet the member schools' identified needs. A

## READINESS REPORT for Advanced™ ACCREDITATION

sense of strong administrative and board support was felt by the visitation team.

- **Stakeholder Communications and Relationships** – The unit communicates with their member schools via surveys, e-mail, wiki, distance learning, skype and face-to-face communication. The latest survey generated a 90%+ response from the schools, which is a commendable response rate. The ESU advisory council, made up of member schools' superintendents, meets four times per year. As reported during the visit, many on-site services are provided to member schools by the unit. This has the effect of building strong relationships within the ESU region.
- **Commitment to Continuous Improvement** – In order for a unit to be prepared to meet the rigorous standards and protocols of Advanced, they must demonstrate a strong commitment to continuous improvement. ESU 17 has a solid process in place that ensures that this effort is embedded in what they do on a daily basis. The CIP team meets twice a month which definitely drives the unit toward sustainable continued improvement.

**Section 3:** Please summarize the ESA's current efforts to engage in a continuous process of improvement and quality assurance.

- In order for a school, district, and even an educational service unit to demonstrate a strong commitment to continuous improvement, their process must be systemic, systematic, and most importantly – sustainable.
- ESU 17 has successfully demonstrated to the readiness team their commitment to CIP by their comprehensive completion of the self-readiness survey, their thoughtful analysis of the survey and implementation of identified interventions. The CIP process described and discussed during the visit demonstrates that the unit's improvement process is systemic, based upon systems thinking, systematic, embedded in what they do every day, and sustainable with the continued support of the administration, board, and leadership team.

#### Section 4

#### RECOMMENDATION OF VISITING STATE OFFICE REPRESENTATIVE:

- ☒ Recommended as a candidate for accreditation
- ☐ Recommended to remain as an applicant

Don Loseke

AdvancED Representative

6/14/ 2011

Date

#### STATE DIRECTOR APPROVAL:

Freida Lige  
State Director

6/14/11  
Date

- ☒ Approved as a candidate for accreditation
- ☐ Approved to remain as an applicant

#### Next Steps: Please summarize the next steps for the ESA.

- Review the report and share with staff. After review, the agency sends a Letter of Commitment to the Office of Accreditation for AdvancED (Attn: Warren Jacobson, PO Box 871008, Tempe, AZ 85287-1008). The commitment letter must include documentation that the ESUs governing board and agency head have given approval for ESU 17 to enter the process (this can be in the form of Board minutes).
- Upon receipt of the findings of the Readiness Visit and Letter of Commitment from the ESU, AdvancED will send a Candidacy Letter to the ESU Administrator. This letter moves the agency into candidacy status.
- The QAR visit is conducted within 18 months of entering candidacy status. On a form provided by AdvancED, the ESU will select three dates that would work to host a QAR visit. The form will be sent to AdvancED who will select one of the dates for the visit and will communicate the finalized date for the QAR Visit to the ESU.
- Meanwhile, continue to implement the collaboration model used in earlier work in the development of the Self-Assurance Review. Continue to develop, implement, and evaluate the ESU 17 School Improvement Plans, based on continued analysis of school and student achievement data, program data, perceptual data, and demographic data.

If there are any questions, please contact the AdvancED-Nebraska at 402-471-0955.